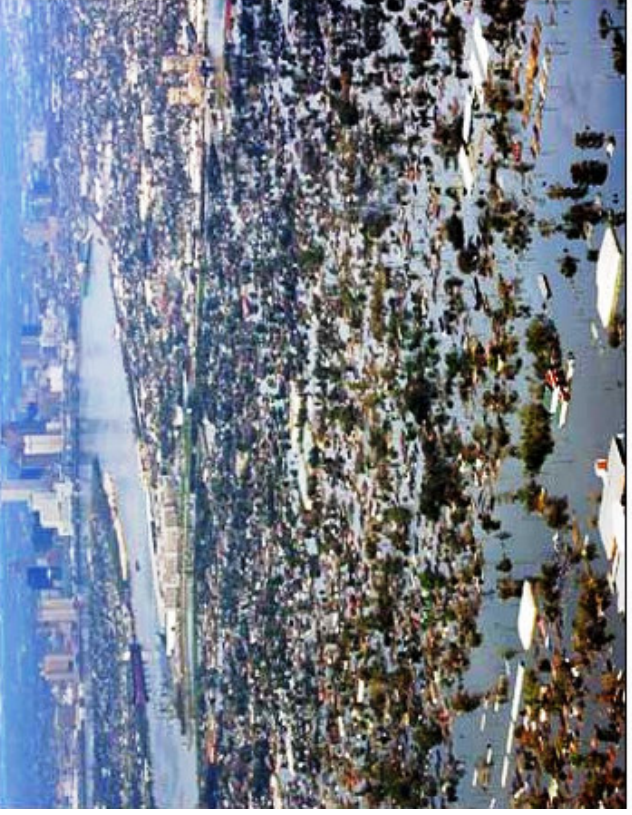


# **Lessons from the Gulf Coast:**

## **Principles of Effective Community Rebound**

Emily Chamlee-Wright

Elbert H. Neese Professor of Economics, Beloit College  
Affiliated Senior Scholar, The Mercatus Center



## **Our Motivation: What gives society its ability to rebound in the face of disaster?**

*[The] perpetual consumption and reproduction of capital affords the explanation of what has so often excited wonder, ...the great rapidity with which countries recover from a state of devastation; the disappearance, in a short time, of all traces of the mischiefs done by earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, and the ravages of war. An enemy lays waste a country by fire and sword, and destroys or carries away nearly all the moveable wealth existing in it: all the inhabitants are ruined, and yet in a few years after, everything is much as it was before.*

--JS Mill, *The Principles of Political Economy*

## Three “legs” of community resilience



- Political/Legal Environment
- Market Environment
- Civil Society

Community rebound is too complex a task to lay at the doorstep of government.

Functioning communities are built (and rebuilt) from the ground up.





**The St. Bernard  
Unified School**

- Andrew Jackson High
- Arabi Elementary
- Chalmette Middle
- Chalmette High
- Gauthier Elementary
  - Joseph Davies Elementary
- Lacoste Elementary
- PGT Beauregard
- NOVA Academy
- Rowley Elementary
- Trist Middle
  - Sebastien Roy Elementary
- St. Bernard High
- W. Smith Elementary



**Doris Voitier, Superintendent  
Unified School District in St. Bernard Parish**





Alice Craft-Kerney, R.N.  
Executive Director, Lower Ninth Ward Health Clinic







# Wash Zone Laundromat



# Discount Zone Gas & Groceries

Kasim: “ [Most of my customers] were locals that come everyday and you see them and you get to know them by name. You know their problems, you know their children, you socialize with them.”

Kasim: “ ... [I]f there is a gas station or convenience store in your place, you feel that there is life in it, if there is none—it would look...dead. If there is someone who can provide [gas and groceries], they can live around [there] and they can go on with their lives.”

# **Community Rebound in California**

- **Business owners vow to return to work.**
- **Businesses share resources to provide public services.**
- **Recovery information sharing.**

So given that recovery is based primarily on civil society, why are some communities having such a hard time making progress?



## **Sources of uncertainty**

- bureaucratic and regulatory rigidity
- government control over the redevelopment planning process
- assistance programs that promise what they cannot deliver

Bureaucratic and regulatory rigidity often keeps residents, business people and community leaders from deploying their “local knowledge”



Voitier: [W]e had our [FEMA] kickoff meeting in September. We didn't even know what a kickoff meeting was nor did we know we were in one until after it was over. ...In their little book, which I read later, they tell them, meet in the person's home territory basically. Now... at the time, you know, we were operating out of Baton Rouge, and so were all of the people who attended this meeting. We all got rental cars and drove down [to St. Bernard Parish] and met on the third floor of the building over by Chalmette Refining at 2'O clock in the afternoon in 100 degree heat with no air conditioning or anything...

[M]y assistant superintendent and I walk into this meeting and there were 27 people sitting around this table. . . and we were going through the introductions.

And the first two people said, “We’re so and so. We are the FEMA historical restoration team.” I said, okay, tell me what you do. “Well, we make sure any buildings that are 40 years old or more, they’re designated a historical building, we make sure all of the rules and regulations are followed for that or if there are any historical documents, paintings, or whatever, that they’re preserved properly, and that you do everything you’re supposed to do . . .” Now here we are just trying to, you know, trying to recover, not worrying too much about that sort of stuff, but... thank you very much.

So the next two, introduced themselves and I said, well who are you? “We are the FEMA environmental protection team.” I said, tell me what you do? Well, same thing. “We make sure all of the environmental laws are followed, that if there are any endangered species that they’re protected,” you know, yadda, yadda, yadda. Okay. The next two, “We are the FEMA 404 mitigation team.” I’m looking at them and I’m thinking, what in the heck is 404 mitigation? Because the next two were the FEMA 406. ... So I’m looking at them, I’m thinking, I don’t know what 404 was and I certainly don’t know what 406 is. ... And you know... [I’m thinking] can’t somebody help me get a school started?

Regulations suited to “normal circumstances”  
often make little sense in a post-disaster  
situation.





**CLOSED**

Lower 9th Ward  
**HEALTH CLINIC**  
A Division of FAST SIGNA

101



Craft-Kerney: “ ...[I]n neighborhoods you need certain things in order to survive, for sustainability. You need schools. You need churches. You need medical care. You need places to shop. We consider [the clinic] as just one more thing that will anchor our community. And we are not going to be deterred by the challenges that are facing us because we know that our parents had challenges and they overcame it. And the thing that we’re hoping is that people will continue to stay in the fight. Because what happens is people are getting discouraged. They’re losing hope. Because so much was promised and it spilled as it reached them.

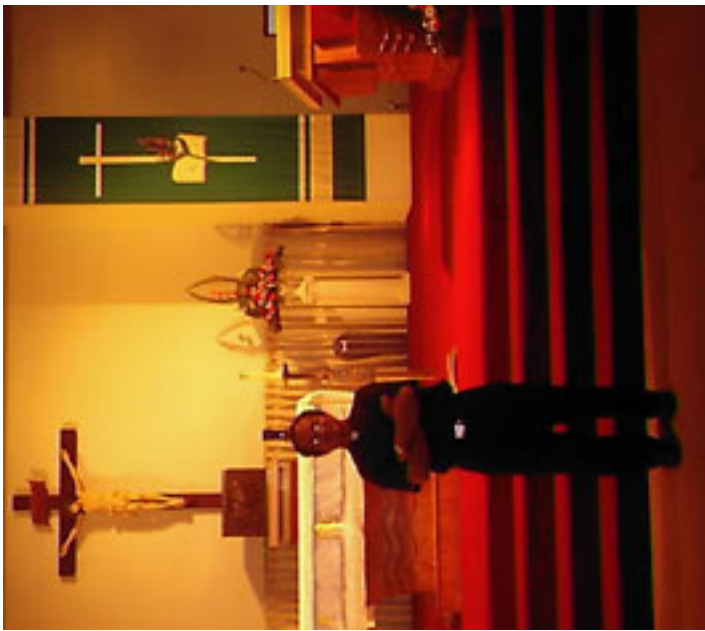
Government control over the redevelopment planning process has been a persistent source of unnecessary uncertainty.

**Signal noise coming from the redevelopment planning process has meant many communities remain in a state of limbo.**

- No telephone lines for a year and a half.
- No water for over a year.
- Still no gas service.

Without telephones, water, and gas, residents have few businesses they can rely on. Without residents, businesses have no customers upon whom they can rely.







## Road to nowhere

- Promises delayed keep people on the fence.
- False expectations caused further delays.
- The longer the wait, the weaker the chances of effective community rebound.

So what can government do to foster an environment in which robust bottom-up recovery can unfold?

A few basic principles...

1. Minimize policy-related uncertainty
2. Regulatory preparedness
3. Promise relatively little, deliver swiftly

## Principle 1: Minimize policy-related uncertainty

We should not see a disaster as an opportunity to engage in social engineering.

## Principle 1: Minimize policy-related uncertainty

Don't change the terms of contractual agreements after the fact.

## Principle 1: Minimize policy-related uncertainty

If changes need to be made, they need to be made swiftly so assets can be properly valued and people can get on with their lives.

## Principle 2: Regulatory preparedness

Create in advance a leaner regulatory regime that would be triggered with a declaration of emergency.



**Principle 3: Promise relatively little, but deliver on those promises swiftly.**

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